

## Message Text

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FOL CAIRO 5067 SENT ACTION SECSTATE DAMASCUS INFO BONN  
FEB 15, 1971 REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PEPR PINT SHUM EG SY

SUBJECT: PROBLEMS OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS IN EGYPT  
- AND SYRIA

REF: (A) BONN 2580 (NOTAL), (B) CAIRO 4870 (NOTAL)

1. ON FEBRUARY 15, BARON VON BLOMBERG, PRESIDENT OF  
WORLD UNITED RELIGIONS ORGANIZATION (REF A), AND MESSRS  
CHARLES WATSON AND IGNATIUS YACoub OF GENERAL CON-  
FERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS IN BEIRUT, CALLED ON  
POLCOUNS TO INFORM EMBASSY OF THEIR CURRENT CONCERNS  
REGARDING SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS IN EGYPT AND SYRIA  
(VON BLOMBERG AND WATSON ARE AMERICANS; YACoub IS  
LEBANESE). PURPOSE OF CALL WAS NOT TO REQUEST EMBASSY  
ACTION BUT TO SEEK ADVICE AND KEEP USG INFORMED OF THEIR  
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ACTIVITIES.

2. EGYPT. SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS NUMBER ABOUT 3000.  
THERE ARE TWO GOE PRACTICES THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE  
CHANGED. ONE HAS TO DO WITH PRACTICE OF GIVING NATION-  
WIDE EXAMS TO STUDENTS ON SATURDAYS. ADVENTISTS HAVE  
BEEN IN TOUCH WITH MINISTRY OF EDUCATION TO REQUEST

THAT STUDENTS FROM THEIR SCHOOLS BE PERMITTED TO TAKE EXAMS ON OTHER THAN THEIR SABBATH. MINISTRY IS STUDYING MATTER. SECOND PROBLEM HAS TO DO WITH MILITARY SERVICE. THEY MET WITH ACTING FONMIN BUTROS GHALI FEBRUARY 13 TO MAKE CASE THAT ADVENTISTS BE PERMITTED TO RENDER SOCIAL SERVICE IN LIEU OF MILITARY SERVICE IN VIEW OF BIBLICAL INJUNCTION AGAINST TAKING OF HUMAN LIFE. BUTROS GHALI APPARENTLY GAVE THEM SYMPATHETIC HEARING, EXPRESSED GOE'S INTEREST IN HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SAID HE WOULD DISCUSS IT WITH MINISTRY OF DEFENSE.

3. SYRIA. BARON VON BLOMBERG PLANS TO TRAVEL TO DAMASCUS ON FEBRUARY 20 TO ARRANGE APPOINTMENT WITH PRESIDENT ASAD OR SOMEONE IN PRESIDENCY. HE CLAIMS TO HAVE CONTACTS WHO CAN HELP HIM MAKE APPOINTMENTS WITH PRESIDENCY AND OTHER MINISTRIES. IF VON BLOMBERG SUCCEEDS IN SETTING UP APPOINTMENT FOR WATSON AND YACOB, THEY WOULD COME TO DAMASCUS ON FEBRUARY 22. THERE ARE ONLY SOME 500 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS IN SYRIA AND PRINCIPAL PROBLEM HAS TO DO WITH PROPERTY TAKEN OVER BY GOVERNMENT IN 1967. SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS HAVE NOT BEEN RECOGNIZED AS RELIGION IN SYRIA AND PROPERTY WAS TAKEN OVER BECAUSE IT WAS BEING USED AS A CHURCH. (THEY HAVE OTHER CHURCH PROPERTY IN SYRIA WHICH HAS BEEN CLOSED DOWN SINCE 1967.) WORSHIP SERVICES SINCE THEN HAVE BEEN HELD ONLY IN PRIVATE HOMES. PURPOSE OF MEETING WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SYRIAN AUTHORITIES WOULD BE TO BEGIN PROCESS OF ATTEMPTING TO GET PROPERTY BACK, AND PRESUMABLY RIGHT TO PRACTICE THEIR RELIGION.

4. FOR DAMASCUS. BARON VON BLOMBERG PLANS TO CALL AT EMBASSY UPON ARRIVAL TO SEEK GUIDANCE ON HOW TO PROCEED. AS NOTED ABOVE, HE IS NOT SEEKING EMBASSY INTERCESSION OR DIRECT ASSISTANCE. HE WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY ATTEMPT TO CONFIRM HIS HOTEL RESERVATION AT SEMIRAMUS BEGINNING FEBRUARY 20. WOULD ALSO APPRECIATE NAME OF EMBOFF WHO HE SHOULD CONTACT UPON ARRIVAL. MATTHEWS UNQUOTE VANCE

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## Message Attributes

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